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MINUTES OF THE JUNE 29, 1999 MEETING OF
THE COMMISSION ON FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 a.m. by Chairman Carozza with the following members present: Commissioners Chatfield, Haber, Kowalski, Maheu, McCarthy, Mullen and Nicol. Commissioner Munkenbeck arrived at 9:45 am. Commissioners Andresen, Gomeau, Johnson, Milewski, and Vendetta were excused. Staff members Lewandowski, Morrissette, Ouellette, Piechota and Piskura were present.

Guests to the meeting were identified as Charles M. Stankye, Jr., Derby Fire School, Red McKeon, Connecticut State Firefighters' Association, Tom Hozebin and Don Heckler from Connecticut Department of Labor, Conn-OSHA and Chief Larry Black, Watertown Fire Department and Litchfield County Chiefs' Association.

Chairman Carozza welcomed the guests to the meeting and asked that they introduce themselves.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Nicol and SECONDED by Commissioner McCarthy to approve the minutes of the May 25, 1999 meeting. Motion carried.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner McCarthy and SECONDED by Commissioner Kowalski to approve the Staff Report for the period of May 15, 1999 - June 14, 1999. Motion carried.

Moving to Unfinished Business, item 4 a.) Mr. Morrissette gave an update on the Strategic Planning Public Forum sessions. He reported that two of the sessions have been completed in Bethel and Cromwell. So far total participation has been about 35-40 individuals not including agency staff. The last sessions are scheduled for this afternoon and evening in Norwich. In addition, we have received correspondence from four interested individuals. As was previously discussed, the proposed schedule for the planning process calls for a forum for Commission member participation following the

facilitator's summary of information. The summary of information will be distributed to those who participated in the Public Forum sessions in addition to a distribution to fire chiefs and the fire service organizations. Participants will have another opportunity to review the issues that came out of the public forums and have another opportunity to provide input. At that point the staff and the Commission will have the opportunity to take those issues raised and identify from them the priority strategic issues which need to be incorporated into our business plan.

Moving to item 4 b.) Mr. Morrissette gave a legislative update. He stated that last week he asked Ted Schroll for a final update however he had not completed his report on the Session. A copy of Bill No. 6870 was distributed for Commission review, this enabling legislation that permits municipalities to enact ordinances for providing local property tax relief to members of volunteer fire and ambulance organizations. During the session it appeared that most of the bills the fire service lobbied for fell to the wayside.

Mr. Morrissette indicated he would forward a final legislative report to Commissioners when received.

A discussion period followed.

Moving to item 4 c.) Mr. Morrissette stated that the Commission received a request from the Litchfield County Chiefs' Association regarding entry level training and assistance to modify it for volunteers. This item was tabled from the May Commission meeting to give the county organization an opportunity to comment on this request.

Chairman Carozza asked Chief Larry Black from Watertown to address the Commission.

Chief Black asked the Chairman for permission to read a statement he prepared to speak on the subject of entry level training. He stated that he hoped to set straight some of the rumors going around and make clear what was originally asked for. The request to the Academy was to develop a course that will teach new recruits safe basic firefighting skills so they may become interior firefighters with the haz-mat operational skills at a reduced number of hours. This course could then be offered as an option to the statewide fire departments so they may choose whether or not to use it. This course would eliminate all the material that is in FF-I that may not be important for the new recruit to know at the onset of their careers. He went on to say where in the letter from the Litchfield County Chiefs or in any other communications with the state's organization has there been any mention of reducing the state's training standards.

Chief Black stated that on May 12 he met with Messrs. Morrissette and Piskura and two State Legislators in Watertown. He stated several times that the object of this request was not to reduce the level of training rather just to repackage it in a form that will help fire departments get firefighters on the trucks faster. This will allow them to attract new volunteers by reducing the number of training hours. Both Messrs. Morrissette and Piskura indicated that at the Commission's direction this was a possibility. They indicated that it would probably be as easy as breaking the current FF-I into two modules. One module to accomplish this task and the other to be offered to firefighters within a certain timeframe of completing the first module so they can become certified.

Chairman Carozza reassured Chief Black that the Commission has discussed this matter at previous Commission meetings and at the Strategic Planning public forums to get as much input as possible before making a decision.

Commissioner Chatfield inquired what is the next step.

Chairman Carozza stated that the Commission should wait until after today's public forums to see if there is any more input. We can then establish a committee to look into this matter and report back at the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Chatfield volunteered to be on the committee to study entry level training.

A question and answer period followed with Commissioners expressing caution and concerns on reducing entry level training.

Chairman Carozza asked if any of the guests had comments to offer on the issue.

Mr. Heckler from Conn-OSHA stated that the Commission has a real challenge before them to retain the same level of training and quality of education, if there is a change, from what is currently FF-I. He expressed concerns on what subjects would be taken out to develop a condensed course and when those subjects would be covered for the firefighter to advance into a leadership role.

Mr. McKeon stated that in his involvement at the federal level and with all 50 states he wonders when the volunteer fire service is going to stop picking and choosing. He added that he has a real problem with what the Litchfield group wants to do to entry-level training. We never know what we're running into when we respond to a fire. Are we going to stop watering down the system? What does this do to FF-II, instructors and fire officers? Is this the beginning and if so what are we going to do tomorrow?

Chairman Carozza stated that this item was tabled at the last meeting and would like to continue to table this issue to form a committee to explore this in more detail to report back to the full Commission.

Commissioner Chatfield inquired if Conn-OSHA gets involved in the process from the very beginning.

Chairman Carozza replied if they are willing at anytime.

Moving to New Business, item 5 a.) Mr. Piechota gave an update of the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) accreditation process. He stated that originally a site visit was scheduled for the end of July, but because of some administrative issues the agency has asked IFSAC to reschedule for the end of August or beginning of September. This will not affect accreditation of certification of anybody in Connecticut because our main certification-testing season doesn't begin until after September. IFSAC has informed us that people who are certified by us before being accredited by IFSAC will probably be eligible for national certification once accredited.

One of the things IFSAC requires is that a local team is established to review policies and procedures that we currently follow to be sure that they comply with IFSAC's requirements. A local pre-accreditation site visit team that includes Commissioners Munkenbeck and Kowalski along with members of the staff was established to review existing policies and procedures and to make recommendations for corrections and/or changes. It has been found that a number of policies and procedures that are required in writing by IFSAC are in fact being accomplished or are in place but have not been set down in writing.

Commissioner Kowalski commented that the points made by IFSAC are very good points and for us to continue on as an accredited agency whether it's Pro-Board or IFSAC a lot of the standard operating procedures we've come to see will serve the organization very well in the future.

Commissioner Munkenbeck stated that he was in total agreement with Commissioner Kowalski that this has been a great exercise that will be valuable for the Commission.

Commissioner Nicol inquired if the first paragraph of the Certification Policies and Procedures was a disclaimer.

Mr. Piechota replied affirmatively. That is required by both the Pro-Board and IFSAC. Essentially what they say is that the Commission should have in writing a policy which states right up front that certification of an individual

will in no way, shape or form affect that individual standing or stature within their own department.

Commissioner Nicol inquired about the frequency of revising test booklets.

Mr. Piechota stated that revision is not done on a standard frequency. The agency tries to have two or three versions of every level of exam available.

Commissioner Nicol asked for an explanation of the following statement:

“Individuals shall not serve as proctors for an examination of the same subject that the individual served as an instructor.”

Mr. Piechota explained that individuals selected to be proctors are chosen based on their level of certification (i.e. Instructor I as the minimum). At the moment we don't have a formal training program for proctors. We have a self-study program that was designed for evaluators in the EMS field that we're proposing be given to all of our examiners, on a voluntary basis for existing evaluators and on a mandatory basis for new evaluators. This program has been used successfully for a number of years in Massachusetts.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Nicol and SECONDED by Commissioner Munkenbeck to adopt the Certification Policies and Procedures. Motion carried.

Moving to item 5 b.) Mr. Piechota gave an overview of reasonable accommodation primarily under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Simply the law says we need to make reasonable accommodations for persons requesting it. The Commission has always done that and we have had a policy to give reasonable accommodation that's been in existence for a long time. One of the accommodations we have made in the past is giving an individual an oral examination should they request it and if they have documentation from a professional that shows this as an appropriate accommodation.

Recently we seem to be getting more and more requests for oral examinations. We felt we should have an independent professional look and see if in fact an oral examination is an appropriate accommodation to be made for a firefighter. We sent a request to the Department of Administrative Services ADA and Testing Office and their recommendation essentially states that based upon the NFPA Standard an oral examination is not in their opinion a reasonable accommodation to be made for a firefighter. It is their opinion that a firefighter based on the NFPA Standard needs to be able to read. Their recommendation is that we would be on very firm ground if we refused a request for an oral examination as an accommodation.

They suggested that we could perhaps make the test period longer or give the test on a computer vs. on paper.

Commissioner Kowalski stated that he agreed with the recommendation 100%.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Kowalski and SECONDED by Commissioner Munkenbeck to eliminate the requirement for oral examination process for certification. Motion carried.

Moving to item 5 c.) Mr. Morrisette gave an overview of the request from the American Red Cross to use the Academy facility as their Southern New England hurricane watch site. He stated following solicitation of comments from Division Directors that a couple of issues have been raised. One issue related to the agency being bound into a long-term agreement and its impact should we have a very bad hurricane season and its affect on facilities and programs being disrupted negatively impacting our programs. The other issue is related to space requirement both internal and external. He recommended that at this time the Commission approve the request based upon a one-year renewable contract.

A discussion period followed.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Kowalski and SECONDED by Commissioner Haber to approve the request for the use of the Academy facility based on a one-year renewable contract. Motion carried.

Moving to item 5 d.) Mr. Morrisette discussed the summer meeting schedule and the possible need to meet as a group either in July or August.

Commissioner Kowalski stated that he would like to see that a committee is assigned to give consideration to the Litchfield County Chiefs' request.

Chairman Carozza stated that a committee would be established before leaving the meeting today. He also indicated that he extended an invitation to the Governor to come to the fire service day last month, which unfortunately he was unable to attend because of a schedule conflict. The Governor's office has been contacted and we are looking towards the end of July to get together and make a presentation to him.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Kowalski and SECONDED by Commissioner Haber to leave the July and August Commission meeting dates as schedule and open to cancel if there is no need to meet. Motion carried.

Mr. McKeon stated that he would make available a copy of the approved legislative bills. He indicated that in EMS testing there is no oral exam offered.

Commissioner Nicol thanked the Commission staff for their assistance with the Annual Apparatus Rodeo. He indicated that this year instead of presenting a plaque to the Commission in recognition for support, a donation would be made to the Firefighters' Memorial.

Commissioner Munkenbeck stated that effective immediately he would be on a sabbatical leave to work on a recruiting and retention project and he is looking for input from everyone. This project is to look for ways to recruit and retain volunteers and in addition to work with Mr. Piskura on starting up a volunteer officer's academy. This is looking at the Fire Officer I and Fire Officer II and seeing what additional skills are needed to bring the best training and management skills to the volunteer fire officers in a way they can use it.

Mr. Piskura gave a brief overview of the report from the Legislative Program Review and Investigations' Committee regarding the EMS System, Phase I in the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Morrisette announced that the next Academy Safety Committee meeting is scheduled for September 22 at 9:00 am. As in the past, all Commissioners are invited to attend.

Mr. Morrisette reported that due to limited staff resources and escalation in the use of the dormitory rooms, we have established an internal moratorium on any outside dormitory use with the exception of the recruit class and the junior camps that have been scheduled for this summer. We are researching our options and have had discussions with a facility management company. We'll keep Commissioners apprised.

Mr. Morrisette stated that the agency received from the Department of Public Health (DPH) an invitation to bid on the administration of emergency medical technician and paramedic examinations. It appears that OEMS is outsourcing their testing services for both EMT and paramedic testing. The due date for the bid is Friday, July 2. At this time we are looking for the Commission's direction for the staff to pursue submitting a bid proposal for consideration.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Maheu and SECONDED by Commissioner Kowalski authorizing the preparation of a bid to undertake the contract for EMS certification testing. Motion carried.

Chairman Carozza announced that he was appointing Commissioners Chatfield, Johnson, Kowalski, Milewski and Mullen to work with him on a committee to study entry-level training. After the final Strategic Planning public forums have been held, committee members will be contacted to establish a meeting schedule.

Mr. Piskura stated along the same lines as responding to the RFP for EMS certification, the agency has also been approached to solicit a response to provide physical ability examinations on behalf of the Connecticut Fire Service. It would entail something to the effect of making facilities available two to four times a year for proctoring physical ability exams.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Kowalski and SECONDED by Commissioner Mullen to prepare a response to become the site for physical ability exams for Connecticut Fire Service. Motion carried.

Mr. Morrissette asked Mr. O'Neil to give an overview of the agency's budget appropriations act.

Mr. O'Neil stated that the agency received a majority of the request for allotment of appropriations for FY 2000. He gave an overview of some of the major items in the budget (i.e. Personal Services, Equipment, Limited Access Highway, etc.).

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Kowalski and SECONDED by Commissioner Haber to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

Chairman Carozza adjourned the meeting at 11:05 a.m.